

North West Notebook

ANN HALL

Editor-given lemons make writers' aids

A lunchtime gripe session about publishing horror stories has given birth to a newsletter that offers a good laugh – and good advice – to poets and writers everywhere.

Sandy Bernstein, a poet and writer from Woburn, and **Sheila Foley**, an illustrator from Stoneham, were complaining at lunch about the rejections they had received and their shabby treatment at the hands of editors. As they were leaving the restaurant, they suddenly realized that of all the publications for free-lance writers, none encouraged them to share their horror stories.

The result was *Sour Grapes*, a newsletter that offers support to the “discouraged, disgruntled, disillusioned and dejected writers of the universe” by letting them vent their frustrations in print. The publication is currently celebrating its first anniversary.

“We were so good at complaining,” their first editorial said, “that we thought we’d try to make a semi-living at it.”

“It was born out of frustration,” says Bernstein. “And a little bit of nuttiness,” adds Foley, who often finishes off Bernstein’s thoughts.

Although it started on a small scale, *Sour Grapes* is now mailed to subscribers in the United States, Canada and Europe.

“Not only are we venting our frustrations, but we’re doing it in a very humorous way, and people seem to like that idea,” Bernstein said.

“The only way you can make rejection seem palatable is to do it in a humorous way. When you put something in a funny way or put a satirical twist on it, you’re getting other writers to look at rejection a little more positively,” Foley added. “Otherwise, you’ll just kill yourself.”

Published quarterly, the newsletter includes features such as “Vintage Whines,” which are particularly juicy stories about rejections and an-



GLOBE PHOTO / CLAY M

Sheila Foley and Sandy Bernstein, editors of *Sour Grapes* newsletter catering to free-lance writers.

noying practices by editors, and “Through the Grapevine,” a listing of writers’ markets, guidelines, updates, contests and workshops. A section called “Wine Sellers” includes ads from publications that accept free-lance submissions.

To make *Sour Grapes* more of an exchange of ideas, Bernstein and Foley include a regular feature called “Bacchus,” where editors (“the Gods of Whine”) speak out about writers and offer do’s and don’ts for hopeful authors.

After they began their project, the two women realized that editors may not have such an easy job, after all. Or, as Foley said, “Now that we’re editors, it’s a whole new world.”

“It opened my eyes to what editors go through,” Bernstein continued. “I kept rewriting our guidelines to make them clearer, but no matter what I do . . .”

“You ask for 600 words and you get 1,000. You say you’re closed to

poetry and what do you get? Poetry,” Foley added.

Bernstein, whose writing specializes in supernatural fantasy and science fiction, is working on her first volume of poetry. Foley is an illustrator and artist, as well as a writer. “I’m just trying to make money at anything I can do,” she jokes.